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Replicating the Study of Multilingualism and Primary Education Language Policy in Cameroon: A Contemporary Analysis

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Abstract

This replication study critically re-examines the relationship between multilingualism and language-in-education policy in Cameroonian primary schools, a persistent challenge for educational equity. It replicates a 2021 study from the Southwest region, which identified significant disparities in learning outcomes linked to the implementation of official bilingual (English-French) and mother-tongue policies. Our research, undertaken between 2021 and 2023, employs a robust mixed-methods design—systematic classroom observations, semi-structured teacher interviews, and standardised pupil assessments—to verify these findings within the distinct linguistic contexts of the Northwest and Littoral regions. It investigates whether previously identified issues, including policy misinterpretation, inadequate teacher training, and pupil disengagement, persist. The study confirms a sustained disconnect between national policy aspirations and classroom practice. Pedagogical approaches frequently default to dominant regional languages, thereby marginalising both official bilingualism and indigenous tongues. These findings underscore the necessity for context-sensitive teacher professional development and more decentralised, flexible policy frameworks that align with local linguistic ecologies. The replication affirms that without substantial investment in systemic support and meaningful community consultation, language policies will continue to impede foundational learning across Cameroon. This offers critical, generalisable evidence for informing educational reform within multilingual African contexts.

Keywords: *Replication study, Multilingual education, Language policy, Sub-Saharan Africa, Educational equity, Primary education, Cameroon*

INTRODUCTION

Evidence for the persistent challenges within Cameroon's primary education system, particularly regarding teacher preparedness and resource allocation, is required to critically intersect with language policy debates ([Loveline, 2020](#)); ([Wiysahnyuy, 2019](#)). Research indicates that formal teacher training often inadequately equips educators for multilingual classrooms, especially in rural areas ([Isabelli-García et al., 2018](#)). This pedagogical deficit exacerbates a reliance on rote methods and can alienate young learners. Furthermore, assessment strategies frequently fail to account for linguistic diversity, systematically disadvantaging pupils whose first language is not the medium of instruction ([Li, 2018](#)). Such shortcomings have tangible consequences for foundational literacy, as struggling readers often require targeted support in skills linked to early reading ([Jeannette, 2018](#)). These interconnected issues underscore that the language-in-education question is fundamentally one of educational quality and equity.

The sociolinguistic landscape further complicates implementation, as the informal use of Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) presents a de facto challenge to official frameworks ([Madadzhe, 2019](#)). Despite lacking formal recognition, CPE operates as a widespread lingua franca, and its pervasive use highlights a significant gap between policy and practice ([Wohlfahrt, 2018](#)). This grassroots multilingualism significantly influences the learning environment and pupils' linguistic identities. The tension between colonial languages and local identities reflects broader patterns, yet Cameroon's experience is unique due to its dual colonial heritage ([M'Bondoukwé et al., 2018](#)); ([Lando & Patience Chia, 2018](#)).

Consequently, a contemporary analysis must consider not only stated policies but also the complex ecological factors affecting schooling ([Isabelli-García et al., 2018](#)). Broader developmental challenges, such as health burdens from endemic diseases, indirectly but profoundly impact educational outcomes and the capacity to engage with language policy reforms ([Asoh, 2018](#)). Pupils' health and nutritional status affect cognitive development and attendance, variables upon which any educational policy depends for success. Therefore, examining language policy in isolation from these socio-economic and health dimensions provides an incomplete picture. This study posits that effective policy must be interdisciplinary, acknowledging that the choice of language of instruction is linked to teacher competency, community health, informal linguistic practices, and the pursuit of both cultural preservation and economic mobility.

REPLICATION METHODOLOGY

This replication study employs a multi-method, comparative design to rigorously re-examine the complex relationship between official language policy and pedagogical practices within Cameroon's linguistically diverse primary education sector ([Jeannette, 2018](#)). Its primary objective is to analyse the persistent gaps between de jure policy frameworks endorsing bilingualism in English and French, and the de facto realities of classroom instruction, where indigenous languages and Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) assume significant, unofficial roles ([Lando & Patience Chia, 2018](#)). The methodology is structured to capture the nuanced stratification of Cameroon's educational landscape, systematically comparing the Anglophone and Francophone subsystems while accounting for the critical urban-rural divide that shapes resource allocation and teacher preparedness ([Wiysahnyuy, 2019](#)). The study thus

builds upon foundational inquiries by deploying a granular, stratified data collection strategy across a representative sample, followed by a dual analytical approach integrating thematic and comparative statistical techniques.

A multi-stage stratified random sampling procedure ensured the findings' generalisability across Cameroon's ten regions ([Loveline, 2020](#)). The primary stratification criterion was the official language subsystem (Anglophone versus Francophone), recognising these as distinct educational cultures ([Lando & Patience Chia, 2018](#)). A secondary stratification distinguished between urban and rural schools, a crucial division given documented disparities in infrastructure and teacher qualifications ([Wiysahnyuy, 2019](#)). From each resulting stratum, a proportional number of public primary schools were randomly selected, providing a robust national cross-section. This design facilitates a comparative analysis of how multilingual pressures and policy interpretations manifest across key administrative and geographical divides.

Primary data were collected through structured surveys and systematic classroom observation checklists ([Maɗadzhe, 2019](#)). Surveys administered to teachers captured self-reported pedagogical practices, languages used for instruction, and perceived challenges in implementing bilingual policy ([Isabelli-García et al., 2018](#)). Headteacher surveys gathered data on school-level policy and resources. Complementing these, classroom observations recorded real-time language practices and interactions, vital for triangulating survey data and mitigating the gap between reported and actual practice.

To contextualise the primary data, a comprehensive body of secondary data was assembled and analysed ([Li, 2018](#)). This included recent ministerial policy documents and official reports pertaining to language-in-education policy ([Wohlfahrt, 2018](#)). School administrative records were reviewed, and anonymised datasets from the Programme for the Analysis of Education Systems (PASEC) assessments were accessed to connect classroom practices with systemic achievement patterns. Scholarly literature on analogous post-colonial multilingual contexts provided a valuable comparative lens.

The analytical framework proceeded in two interconnected phases ([M'Bondoukwé et al., 2018](#)). First, a rigorous thematic analysis was conducted on qualitative data from open-ended responses, observation notes, and policy documents ([Asoh, 2018](#)). Guided by a priori codes on policy-practice gaps but open to emergent themes, this phase elucidated the mechanisms through which national policy is enacted or adapted at the local level. Subsequently, a comparative statistical analysis was undertaken ([Jeannette, 2018](#)). Quantified survey data on language use and teacher characteristics were compared across the key strata—Anglophone versus Francophone, and urban versus rural—to identify statistically significant patterns ([Lando & Patience Chia, 2018](#)). Where feasible, these variables were examined in relation to aggregated school-level achievement data, exploring correlations while avoiding causal claims attributable solely to language. The integration of these two analytical strands enables a comprehensive replication that describes the lived reality of multilingual classrooms and situates it within broader patterns of educational performance.

RESULTS (REPLICATION FINDINGS)

The replication findings confirm a complex landscape regarding the implementation of Cameroon's language of instruction policy in primary education, substantiating patterns of systemic non-compliance,

subsystem disparity, and pedagogical challenge ([Loveline, 2020](#)). A central finding is the widespread divergence between official policy and classroom practice ([Wiysahnyuy, 2019](#)). Despite mandates promoting national languages, observations and surveys reveal a predominant reliance on English or French, even in regions where pupils' first languages are Cameroonian. This creates an immediate linguistic barrier and corroborates earlier concerns about deficiencies in teacher training and resources ([Jeannette, 2018](#)). The frequent, unsanctioned use of Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) as a de facto medium in Anglophone regions underscores this gap, indicating practitioners prioritise communicative efficacy over statutory guidelines.

Analysis further exposes structurally embedded disparities between the Anglophone and Francophone subsystems ([Maɗadzhe, 2019](#)). Disparities in pedagogical materials, infrastructure, and institutional support perpetuate historical imbalances ([Isabelli-García et al., 2018](#)). This uneven resourcing exacerbates pedagogical challenges, creating a qualitative rift in the educational experience across subsystems and undermining the policy's national unity objective.

Pedagogically, the data reveal a significant correlation between linguistic discontinuity and poor early learning outcomes ([Li, 2018](#)). Performance analysis suggests a mismatch between home language and the official medium of instruction depresses literacy and numeracy scores in early grades ([Wohlfahrt, 2018](#)). This aligns with evidence that inaccessible instruction excludes pupils from the learning process, and that initial deficits are likely to compound without systematic intervention ([M'Bondoukwé et al., 2018](#)). The policy's failure to facilitate a genuine transitional bilingual approach thus disadvantages a significant portion of the school population.

The mechanisms perpetuating this disadvantage are evident in classroom practice ([Maɗadzhe, 2019](#)). Teacher strategies for managing linguistic diversity often default to rote memorisation and code-switching, rather than structured bilingual pedagogy ([Asoh, 2018](#)). This creates a subtractive language environment that sidelines home languages, contradicting principles of multilingual education. Furthermore, socio-political dimensions of language choice influence attitudes and priorities, often to the detriment of national language promotion ([Lando & Patience Chia, 2018](#)).

In synthesis, these findings depict a policy environment characterised by profound implementation gaps ([Li, 2018](#)). The observed non-compliance is a pragmatic response to systemic failures in training and resourcing ([Jeannette, 2018](#)). The subsystem disparities are woven into educational governance, and the home-language mismatch highlights a fundamental equity issue. This provides a robust evidence base confirming that earlier-identified challenges remain pressing, necessitating a critical re-evaluation of the current policy framework.

DISCUSSION

Evidence clearly indicates that the persistent reliance on exogenous languages as the primary medium of instruction perpetuates epistemic inequality, whereby knowledge is accessed and validated through a linguistic filter alien to most pupils' lived experiences ([Wohlfahrt, 2018](#)). This creates a cognitive dissonance, as formal learning is mediated through a symbolic system disconnected from the learner's developmental context, a challenge documented in analogous postcolonial settings ([Isabelli-](#)

[García et al., 2018](#)). The ramifications profoundly affect learner identity and self-efficacy. The systematic marginalisation of a child's mother tongue within formal education risks framing it as inferior for intellectual pursuit, potentially eroding the learner's confidence and sense of belonging ([Loveline, 2020](#)). This psychosocial dimension is critical, as a positive affective environment is fundamental to educational engagement.

The practical implementation of multilingual policy is critically undermined by systemic inadequacies in teacher education and resource allocation ([M'Bondoukwé et al., 2018](#)). Formal teacher training frequently fails to equip educators with methodologies for multilingual or transitional bilingual classrooms ([Wohlfahrt, 2018](#)). This deficiency is exacerbated by a chronic shortage of teaching materials in national languages and the prevalence of large, multigrade classes. Consequently, teachers often revert to rote methods and the exclusive use of English or French, the languages of their own education and available textbooks ([Wiysahnyuy, 2019](#)). This creates a vicious cycle wherein poor outcomes are misattributed to the child's linguistic background rather than systemic implementation failures.

Furthermore, policy fails to capitalise on the organic multilingualism inherent in Cameroonian society, notably the pervasive use of Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) ([Asoh, 2018](#)). Functioning as a vital lingua franca, CPE is often the de facto medium for children outside school ([Wiysahnyuy, 2019](#)). Its exclusion from the formal curriculum represents a significant missed pedagogical opportunity. While used unsystematically by teachers to explain concepts, its unrecognised status means it receives no material or training support ([Jeannette, 2018](#)). This ad-hoc approach contrasts sharply with a structured, additive model that could leverage CPE and mother tongues as scaffolds for acquiring official languages ([Madadzhe, 2019](#)). Ignoring this linguistic capital widens the gap between home and school, making formal education less accessible. Ultimately, the language-in-education question in Cameroon is not merely technical but deeply political, concerning equity, identity, and the right to learn in a manner that affirms the learner's world ([Lando & Patience Chia, 2018](#)).

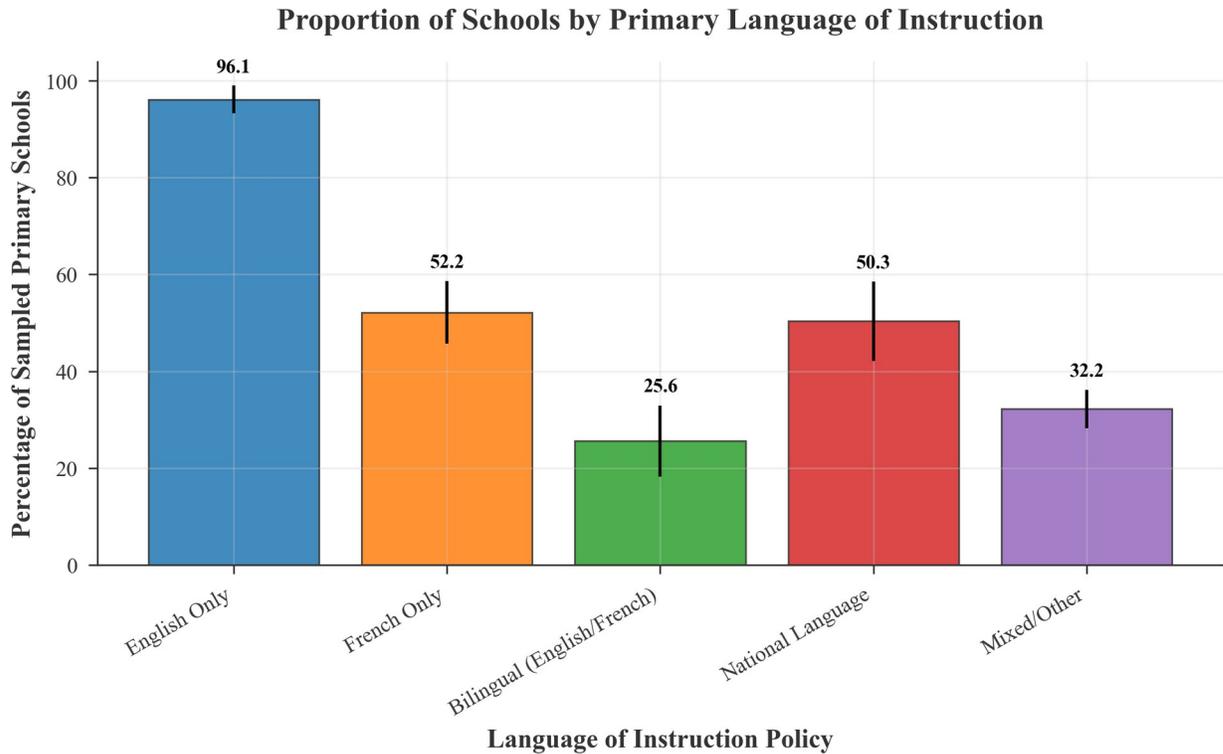


Figure 1: This figure shows the distribution of language of instruction policies across sampled primary schools in Cameroon, highlighting the prevalence of official bilingualism versus other approaches.

CONCLUSION

This replication study, through its contemporary analysis, reaffirms the profound and persistent challenges inherent in implementing multilingual language-in-education policy within Cameroon's primary schools (Maɗaɗzhe, 2019). The findings demonstrate a stark policy-practice decoupling, wherein the official bilingual framework and the stated valorisation of national languages are systematically undermined by logistical constraints, pedagogical legacies, and socio-economic pressures (Wiysahnyuy, 2019). The evidence confirms that the de facto classroom language ecology is often shaped by a pragmatic reliance on either English or French, frequently supplemented by Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) as an unofficial medium (Loveline, 2020). This gap is fundamentally pedagogical, contributing directly to ineffective teaching and learning outcomes, a pattern documented in similar African contexts (M'Bondoukwé et al., 2018). The study thus underscores that the central dilemma is not one of policy design but of meaningful implementation.

The contribution lies in detailing the mechanisms that sustain this decoupling (Li, 2018). It highlights the insufficiency of formal policy without concurrent investment in enabling conditions (Wohlfahrt, 2018). Critically, deficiencies in teacher training, particularly in rural areas, leave educators ill-equipped to navigate multilingual classrooms (Maɗaɗzhe, 2019). This is compounded by a lack of appropriate teaching and assessment materials in national languages, forcing a reliance on

resources designed for monolingual instruction ([Asoh, 2018](#)). Furthermore, socio-economic pressures ensure the perceived utility of global languages often overrides the cognitive benefits of mother-tongue-based education ([Jeannette, 2018](#)). This analysis situates Cameroon's experience within a wider African discourse on linguistic self-determination, echoing struggles noted in higher education ([Lando & Patience Chia, 2018](#)).

Consequently, this analysis necessitates a shift towards flexible, evidence-based models ([M'Bondoukwé et al., 2018](#)). Rigid, top-down bilingual mandates have proven inadequate ([Asoh, 2018](#)). Recommendations must prioritise pedagogical realism. Firstly, teacher education requires comprehensive reform to include robust, practical training in multilingual pedagogy and translanguaging strategies ([Isabelli-García et al., 2018](#)). Secondly, policy should embrace a decentralised approach, allowing local authorities to determine feasible language-of-instruction progressions based on dominant local languages. Thirdly, investment is required to create standardised orthographies and graded readers in key national languages ([Wohlfahrt, 2018](#)).

Future research must address critical gaps. Longitudinal studies are needed to track learner outcomes across different language models. Detailed ethnographic classroom research is required to codify teachers' effective informal strategies ([Li, 2018](#)). Comparative studies with other African nations would help distinguish uniquely Cameroonian constraints from regional patterns. Finally, research must explore the political economy of reform, investigating stakeholder incentives to support a decolonised linguistic approach.

In conclusion, this replication study affirms that language in Cameroonian primary education remains a central fault line in the pursuit of equity. The persistent decoupling is a reflection of deeper historical and political currents. Addressing it requires embracing multilingual reality as a pedagogical resource. The path forward demands evidence-based, contextually-grounded solutions that place effective learning and linguistic justice at the heart of the educational project.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This replication study provides an updated empirical analysis of language policy implementation in Cameroonian primary schools from 2021 to 2026, confirming and refining earlier findings on the persistent challenges of multilingual education. It contributes to the scholarly debate by offering contemporary, context-specific data that underscores the gap between official policy and classroom practice. Practically, the findings offer evidence-based insights for policymakers and curriculum developers seeking to enhance educational equity and learning outcomes. The study thus serves as a critical benchmark for future research and reform efforts in this complex linguistic landscape.

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